

01-77-04 SIDE B

Emily Brown

1976

Fairbanks, Alaska

Karen McPherson, interviewer

Recording starts in a middle of a conversation. Emily Brown is talking about deciding to form an organization in 1969 for Native writers. Karen McPherson asks her for the name of the organization. Emily Brown said the name of their organization is the Alaska Heritage Writers Association (AHWA). It is a non-profit. McPherson asked her why she started the organization. She said because their Native history was fading out. Her book was the first one to have all history of Unalakleet, Alaska. They hope to have an office on campus. She said the university was a place where they learned to live and do things for themselves. Sometimes their ideas do not become a reality. All of their members are professional. They are graduates of universities. Their objective was to write the history of their villages and their philosophy that are not written. One person suggested after they get the information of the Native villages they will have data where scientists, doctors and welfare workers can go to an office and look at the content of the oral history of that village. They can look at demographics, schools, which language they use for speech, and other knowledge. They can look at this before they go into the Native villages and do some work with the Native peoples. She thinks this is valuable. This is not solely her idea, she is the instigator.

Karen McPherson asked her how she came up with the lamp project and what it represents. Emily Brown said it represents the role of Native Alaskans. They know how to identify themselves. Some may not know who they are or what tribe they belong to. They can look in their files and find out [referring to the Alaska Heritage Writers Association]. They will have the census of Native people in their files. They will try to have data regarding their cultures of Alaska.

An unidentified person asked what the philosophy was behind the lamp. Brown said the philosophy comes from the Eskimo people. They had to have light. It is dark living during five or six months of the year. It is also a source of heat for their homes. It was a place where they could cook. They would melt their water through the heat of the lamp. The lamp is always on. It was used to dry their clothes. She thought it should have been duplicated in the educational institution whereby they could identify themselves with the lamp.

Their letterhead has a lamp on it with the words – Thy word is a lamp unto my [?] and It is a light unto my past. It is like their life. They must have light to exist during the darkest part of the world in the winter. It gives them happiness to see light somewhere. It was important that the Native people had the lamp. She has a copy of the origination of the Eskimo lamp. It will be printed and placed down near where the lamp will be. The rock used at the lamp site came from the Army.

McPherson asked how she went about getting the lamp. Brown said that is a 64 dollar question. She said she went to every office on the campus to try to get permission for the lamp. Dr. Hiatt gave them permission to install it. They wrote to every chamber of congress in the state of Alaska and asked for

donations. They were good enough to send them some money. The largest donation came from Chulista Corporation. The joint maintenance will be performed by their group and the University of Alaska.

Karen McPherson asked her to describe the lamp. The unidentified speaker said it is sitting on a big rock, about five feet tall. It is circular in shape. The lamp will be sitting on top. The lamp is shaped in the original Eskimo lamp of the Inupiaq people from the Seward Peninsula. The lamp has different shapes in different places. The Aleut people have a round lamp. Their lamp is oblong circular shape. The wick is from a certain moss found on the tundra. It doesn't burn out. The Native people are natural scientists. They have had to find natural material to help them survive in such conditions. They use seal oil to light it. There are two kinds of seal oil. One is rendered and the other is blubber. The northern Eskimos use the blubber. They put it right next to the light and it oozes out. In the north they usually don't have time to render the oil. They don't use blubber on the Seward Peninsula. Seal oil is eaten by the people after they render it. In the north they eat the frozen blubber.

An unidentified interviewer asked Emily Brown what the program was going to be like. Brown said there will be an opening by Dr. Hiatt. There will be two speakers including Willie Hensley and John Sackett. Dr. Krauss will speak in different languages. Reggie Jewel will light the lamp. She has been asked to sing a Kobuk love song. She talked about other activities planned for the program. The program is scheduled for 5:00 in the afternoon on July 29, [1976]. After the ceremonies everyone can go to the Olympics on campus. She said Mrs. Ramos and Mrs. Gustafson are chairman of the event.

McPherson asked about the idea for the park. Brown said eventually they are going to move a totem pole to the park. The name of the park is Heritage Park, but they are thinking of changing it. She gave an invitation to the park dedication in her Native tongue.

McPherson asked if the park was conceived at the same time as the lamp. Brown said no it was conceived a year after. They had to get permission from the University of Alaska to install it. She had explained to the administration including Dr. Beistline that the Native students coming to the university cannot identify themselves in any way about their culture or who they are. Everything is done the way the University of Alaska is built. The reason they wanted to install the lamp was because it represents their philosophy of life in the rugged home country in the north. She said it will encourage them to be who they are and how they could be identified themselves. This would give them warmth at the university instead of not having any of their philosophy shown on the campus. She said the educators wonder why the Native students fail and become discouraged. It will be the first time in the United States that something of their way of life will be shown on a campus. The students will be a part of the life of the university. It shows their identity and heritage. She said the art of the lamp is beautiful.

McPherson asked who created the lamp. Brown said she did. Mr. Celinski helped her a lot. She wasn't interested in contemporary art work. Celinski suggested that she make a ceramic lamp and sell it. She didn't want the money and turned the whole thing over to the pottery works at the university for a student scholarship. The design of the lamp on campus was from the ones she made. The model of the lamp is not too heavy. The lamp will be made of metal. Dr. Moyer and Larry Hobbles were helpful with the workmanship of the lamp. It is a joint affair with the university. She talked about funding.

McPherson asked how the lamp represents Indians, too. Brown said it is because the Indians have the same kind of lamp. They have a different shape for their lamp. She talked about the Indians trading for the seal oil to use in their lamp. Seal oil does not give off a lot of smoke. Eskimos prevented Indians from

moving into their area. They wanted the priority of ownership. None of the Indians except the Eyak have established their homes along the coastal areas. They had wars to prevent the Indians from coming into their areas. In the past they were enemies. The last war was at Unalakleet.

Brown said they have 25 or 30 members in their AHWA group. They are seeking funding from Washington, D.C. for their work. There are 114 Eskimo villages in Alaska. They are destined to write the history of every village in Alaska. It will take money to do this. There are 14 tribes in Alaska. They intend to do their own map with information. Many of their towns are ghost towns. They hope to have a contest for the map involving high school students.

The unidentified interviewer asked if people will be wearing traditional clothing at the dedication. Brown said they are asking their speakers to wear their traditional clothing. She may wear her parka. She talked about other arrangements being made and advertising for the dedication. They have planted different kinds of trees in the new park. They will eventually plant alder willow because of its cultural value. The ptarmigan willow would not grow here. She talked about refreshment plans for after the dedication ceremonies.